

G17: The Ruin of Britain

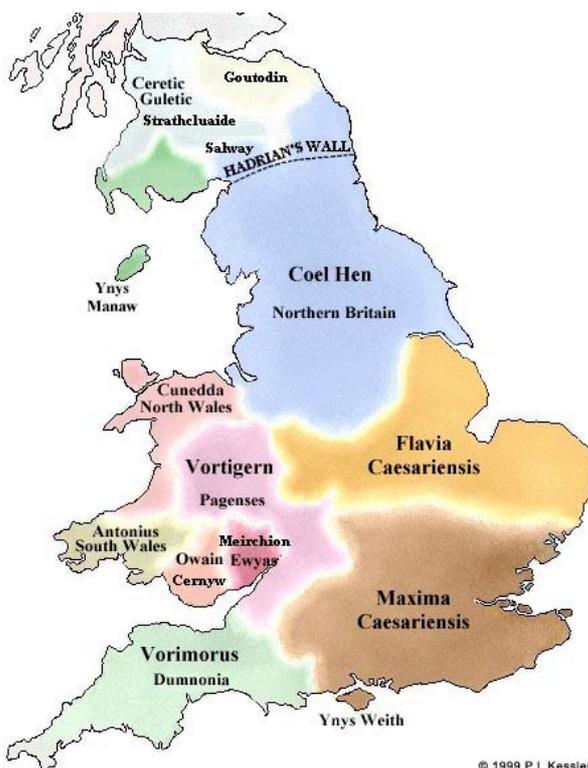
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings

WC 3629

Sometime about 540 AD a Celtic Christian monk called Gildas Bandonicus set in writing his thoughts on the wickedness of the times and in doing so, left us the earliest and only substantial account of the arrival of the Angles and Saxons in Britain. That we view these peoples as a conquering horde, albeit forefathers of the English nation and its language, is largely due to Gildas' scathing account of events, even though he was writing seventy years after the sack of Lindisfarne. His language becomes even stronger perhaps because he blamed the British king for bringing such a scourge upon his people.

Then all the councillors, together with that proud tyrant Gurthrigern [Vortigern], the British king, were so blinded, that, as a protection to their country, they sealed its doom by inviting in among them (like wolves into the sheep-fold), the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful both to God and men, to repel the invasions of the northern nations Those very people whom, when absent, they dreaded more than death itself, were invited to reside, as one may say, under the selfsame roof.

Gildas wrote his sermons to castigate corrupt priests and officials of his day, not for posterity, but his account of a bloody invasion has remained the received wisdom even up to modern times.

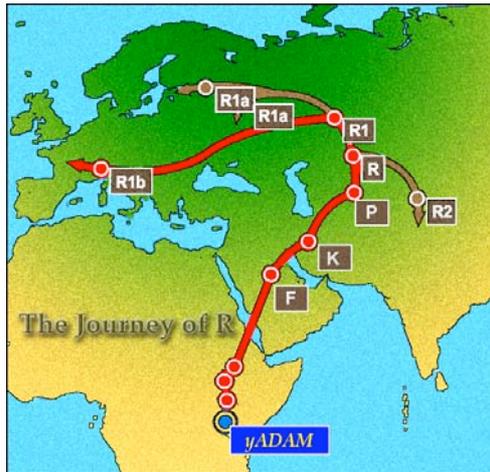


Considering that they were in control of Britain for over 400 years, the Romans left an arguably small genetic footprint on British soil. What trace of their genes they did leave behind are most probably not so much Italian but more characteristic of the men in the legions, recruited from all corners of the Roman Empire and posted to Britain. Some of these soldiers of course, remained after their service had ended, accepting grants by the Roman administration of land which had previously been British-owned farms.

If we look at the probable y-chromosomal legacy, obviously it would have included quite a lot of R1b given western European origins of

some of the legions. However, the Thracian and Dacian units and perhaps some of the Pannonian would have brought E3b with them while the Cimmerians probably would have contributed Haplotype G to the gene pool. What would have been missing from this mix would have been genes of Nordic origins including R1a and I1a or, if there were some Nordic legionaries, they would have been very few in number. So, before we look at Britain after the Romans left, we must first examine two other haplogroups who play an important part in the genetic diversity of the British Isles and along the way, inspired the sermons of the irate Gildas.

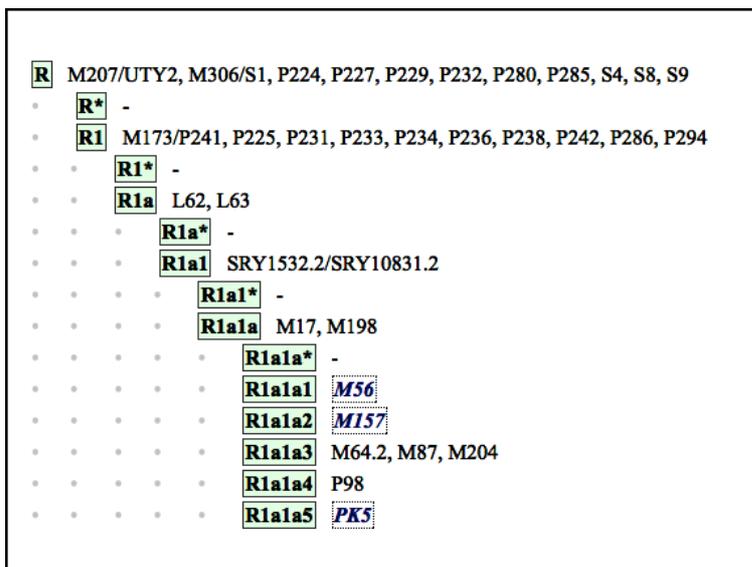
The "other" R



In the last Unit, “Clouties on the Family Tree” I described the “Journey of R”, mentioning along the way the various y-Haplogroups which emerged. Our concern then was with the “R” which ended up as the majority haplogroup in Europe, R-M269 which was a derivative of R1b.

As the diagram shows, a mutation on R1 somewhere in the Eurasian Steppes north of the Black and Caspian Seas resulted in the "other

R", R1a. Not as prolific as its brother, R1b, this lineage is still relatively young, the frequency of the R1a1 gene in contemporary populations suggesting that it originated about 15 KYA¹. It evolved in the Ukrainian refuge to the north and north-east of the Black Sea during the LGM and spread from there, probably up the Dnieper River valley, into those parts of Europe peopled these days by speakers of Balto-Slavic languages, especially Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia where roughly one out of every two males carries this mutation. About a quarter of Icelandic males also carry it as do

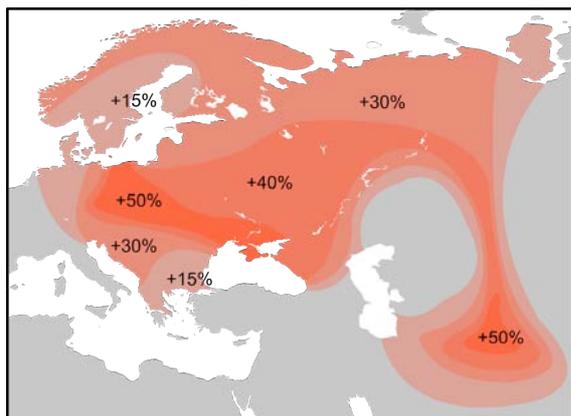


many in the British Isles. Clearly, it was carried to both those locations by the Vikings. One of the best known descendants of R1a in Britain was *Somerled*, founder of Clan Donald who is estimated today to have over half a million descendents world-wide!



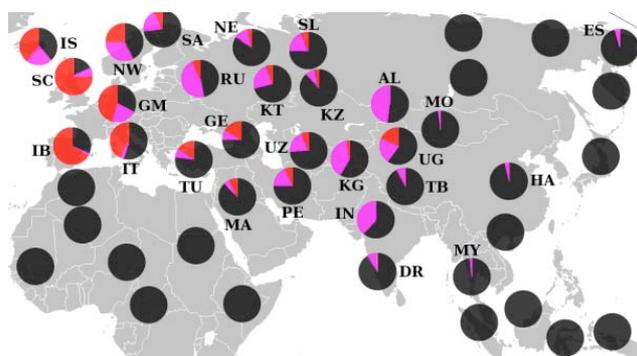
The sub-clades of R1a

¹ The fact it still retains the ancestral DYS 393 = 13 which it inherited from the para-haplogroup R* supports this young age.



Some theories tend to associate this haplogroup with speakers of the Proto-Indo-European language of the Kurgan culture which, you will remember, was the culture in which the horse was domesticated about 4,500–4,000 BC and was so named by archaeologist Maria Gimbutas² (of *The Goddess* fame).

Distribution of R1a



R1b and R1a in Europe

Although as can be seen from the phylogenetic tree, there are several clades of R1a, most seem to have little relevance to European genetic genealogy except for R1a1, defined by M17 and shown in the pie graphs below coloured purple compared with

the distribution of its brother haplogroup, R1b (coloured red). Note that R1a is more prevalent in eastern Europe but is also found in Scandinavia where it travelled to Britain with the Vikings. We will return to y-Haplogroup R1a1 later when we look at the Vikings and their contribution to the genetic landscape of the British Isles.

The Dark Ages?

Even before the Romans left Britain in 410 AD, the Picts from the North, and the Scotti and Irish from the west had begun to raid the territory. In 367, various Teutonic tribes from across the North Sea combined with the Picts and Scotti to launch a combined attack in the so-called Threefold Conspiracy. Even as the Romans were withdrawing, in 408 AD Britannia was invaded by yet other "barbarians", this time the Saxons and most probably, some Anglians. British *civitates* — the urban centres — defended themselves both before and after the Roman withdrawal with the help of Saxon and Angle mercenaries. The Romans had established this practise with the result that over a long period of time, the "Saxon Shore" as it came to be called became a place of Teutonic settlement. Oppenheimer in *The Origins of the British*³ argues that the seeds of Anglo-Saxon language and the Anglo-Saxon genetic legacy date from this much earlier settlement rather than from the post-Roman invasions by the Teutonic tribes.

² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan_hypothesis

³ Oppenheimer, S: *The Origins of the British*, Carrol and Graff, NY 2006

Genetically, however, the picture is not as clear-cut as moving lines on a map. Surprising, in one sense, the majority of the English are not English but British. Although political power evolved to the Angle-Saxon (and Jutes) settlers, genetic evidence points to the majority of the indigenous people remaining where they had always been. Earlier theories of massive emigrations — for example, to Brittany — appear to exaggerate the numbers involved and wrongly imply a wave of refugees fleeing in the front of attacking armies of Angles and Saxons. That there were violent raiding parties, especially in the early days, remains certain, but invasion and replacement, as we have seen in so many other historical situations, seems to over-state the case and distort the view we have of our ancestors in those rapidly changing times.

I don't particularly want to get involved in questions of "Who are the English?" since the matter seems to be controversial at the moment, particularly since the publication of Oppenheimer's recent book, *Origins of the British*⁴ which has quite a lot to say on this. In an article summarising his research, Oppenheimer⁵ asks

Who was here when the Romans came?

So who were the Britons inhabiting England at the time of the Roman invasion? The history of pre-Roman coins in southern Britain reveals an influence from Belgic Gaul. The tribes of England south of the Thames and along the south coast during Caesar's time all had Belgic names or affiliations. Caesar tells us that these large intrusive settlements had replaced an earlier British population, which had retreated to the hinterland of southeast England. The latter may have been the large Celtic tribe, the Catuvellauni, situated in the home counties north of the Thames. Tacitus reported that between Britain and Gaul "the language differs but little."

The common language referred to by Tacitus was probably not Celtic, but was similar to that spoken by the Belgae, who may have been a Germanic people, as implied by Caesar. In other words, a Germanic-type language could already have been indigenous to England at the time of the Roman invasion. In support of this inference, there is some recent lexical (vocabulary) evidence analysed by Cambridge geneticist Peter Forster and continental colleagues. They found that the date of the split between old English and continental Germanic languages goes much further back than the dark ages, and that English may have been a separate, fourth branch of the Germanic language before the Roman invasion.

⁴ op. cit.

⁵ Oppenheimer, S: Myths of British ancestry, *Prospect Magazine*, Issue 127, October 2006

Oppenheimer also argues that much of the genetic legacy in England dates from Neolithic times and not only from the Dark Ages and their so-called invasions. For example, it is argued that when Doggerland sank, refugees from those submerging North Sea plains were divided, some going to England, some to Friesland on the continental mainland. This would explain the presence in England of genetic characteristics impossible to differentiate from those in modern Friesland. The alternative is that they arrived as a result of invasion by large numbers of men from northern Germany and the lowlands.

Oppenheimer collates huge amounts of historical and genetic material but one is always left with the uncertainty of his "bikini haplotypes" and now, of course the doubts cast by his acceptance of the Semino assumption that western Europe was repopulated by R-M269 people from the Franco-Cantabrian refugia. Nonetheless, we can be fairly confident in accepting his final word on the "invasion" and "massacre" theories:

A picture thus emerges of the dark-ages invasions of England and north-eastern Britain as less like replacements than minority elite additions, akin to earlier and larger Neolithic intrusions from the same places. There were battles for dominance between chieftains, all of Germanic origin, each invader sharing much culturally with their newly conquered indigenous subjects.

Gildas, all those centuries ago, was just plain wrong and his assertions more propaganda than historical fact. Even the Venerable Bede, writing a couple of hundred years after Gildas, tried to put the record straight, but it has been the bloody drama of Gildas' assertions which has gripped and held our imagination ever since.

The Norse Vikings

When we talk of "the Vikings" we tend to confuse two identifiably different groups of people and, to some extent, different historic events⁶. The so-called *Anglo-Saxon Conquest* involved first, raiding parties and later, settlers who left homelands in northern Germany, Denmark, part of the Netherlands and the section of the Norwegian Baltic coast opposite the Jutland Peninsula. They mostly settled in England, particularly on the eastern and south-eastern coasts although some Angles and possibly Frisians also occupied the Borders and southern region of eastern Scotland where they established the roots of the Doric language of Robbie Burns, that of Lowlands Scots. Genetically, their y-chromosomal lineages are

⁶ We also tend to overlook the Normans who were "Vikings". Fellow-settlers in Normandy with Duke Rollo included Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Norse. Their descendants who accompanied Duke William across the Channel included Franks and local "Celts", including supporters from Brittany.

found today most commonly from Northumberland and Durham to Kent and Sussex.

But there was another group collectively labelled "Vikings" who came from further north along the Norwegian coast whom historians distinguish from their southern cousins as *Norse Vikings* or simply, Norse. They came, first as raiding parties but later to colonise Scotland and parts of Ireland, the Isle of Mann and the Orkney and Shetland Islands.

Vikings from various sources had been raiding Scotland and its islands ever since the sack of Lindisfarne in 793 AD and of Iona and Skye in the following year. These isolated monastic settlements where Scottish kings liked to store their treasures were of course, attractive destinations for pagan Viking raiding parties. A hundred years after Lindisfarne, in 893 AD, the Danes mounted a major offensive in Scotland in which the Pictish nobility was virtually wiped out. The Danish hero, Halfdan broke away from the Danish Army to lead attacks on eastern Scotland while other Vikings based in the Orkneys raided the coast of the Moray Firth. In 900 AD a fortress south of Aberdeen, Dunottar, had fallen to the raiders while the west coastal settlements were under constant and bloody attack by mixed bands of Celt and Viking marauders. The situation was finally taken in hand by King Constantine mac Aed (900-943 AD) who, through every weapon at his disposal, including making war, diplomacy and even marriage exchange, succeeded in beating back the attack from the Vikings from the sea and from the Anglo-Saxon invaders from the Danelaw and Northumbria to the south.

But the Norse Vikings not only raided — eventually they settled. The densest settlements were in Caithness and in the off-shore islands to the north. Thus, even as in centuries past when Scotland had a north-south divide between Picts in the north and Britons in the lowlands, so after the Viking settlements there was a division across the land.

The Britons of the Lowlands and Border areas were largely the Romano-Celtic people who remained in the region after the Roman withdrawal. They seem to have loyalties as mixed as their genes, never really knowing which way to turn — to the north, to the Picts, or to the south, to the Angles of Northumbria. They were subdued (that is perhaps the nicest word) in 756 AD by King Aethelfirth, thus establishing Northumbrian ascendancy in the region. It was the Angles of Northumbria and perhaps some Friesians who established the base for the Doric or Lowlands Scots language which, as already mentioned, was closely related to Flemish, Dutch and Old English.

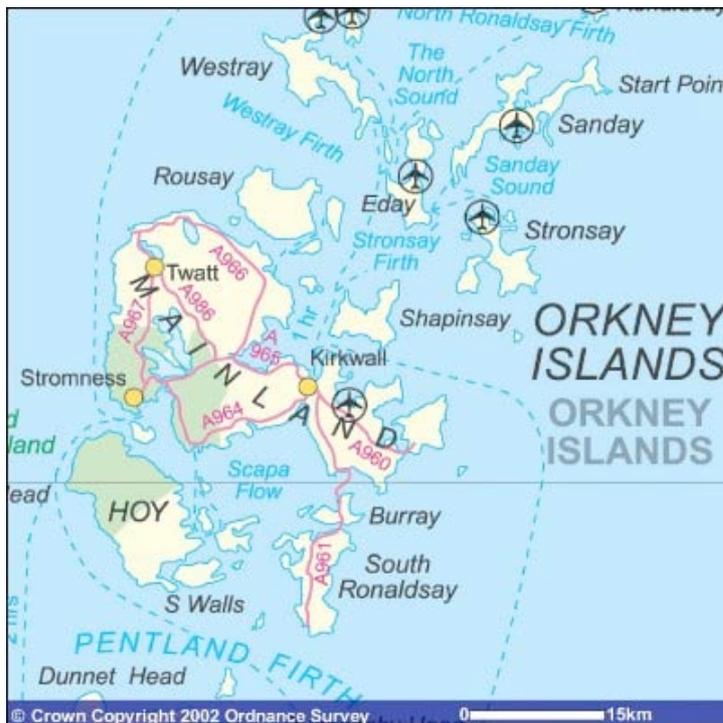
Remembered historically as savage warriors, most of the Norse Vikings who settled in Scotland were an overwhelmingly rural people who came there to find new land to farm as had been their way for centuries in Norway.

Norse settlement in the Orkney and Shetland Islands

Orkney



Since 1472, the Orkney Islands have belonged to Scotland but were originally annexed by Norway in 875 AD⁷. There is very little on record about the history of Orkney except for the rather imaginative *Orkneyingasaga*. However, from archaeological remains, we do know that up until the 8th Century, Orkney was inhabited by a Bronze Age people ruled by a Pictish élite. We also know that the 12th Century *Historia Norwegiae* reports that during the 9th Century reign of King Harald hárfagri Hálfðanarson (*Harald Fairhair*) a band of Norse Vikings invaded Orkney and killed all the Picts. This seems to be one of the rare examples of invasion and total replacement of a population which can be attested to by historical record.

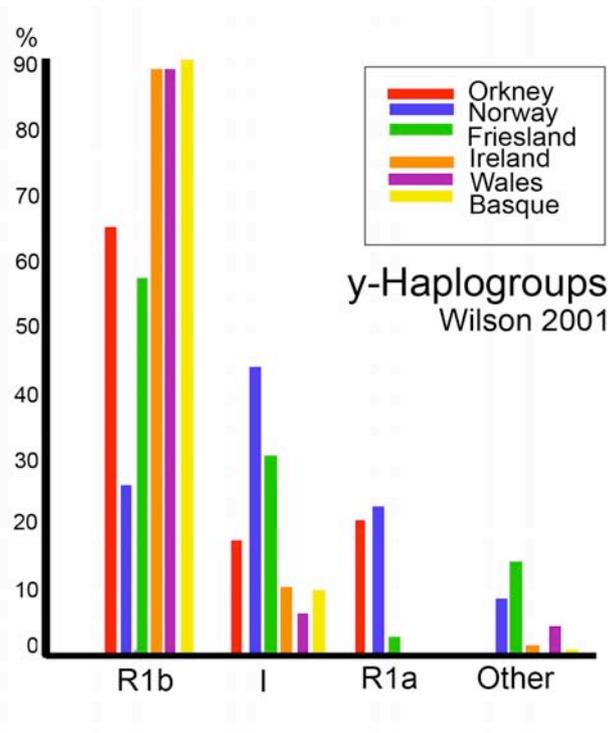


Orkneyingasaga is one of the *Icelandic Sagas* and was written in the 13th Century. It perpetuates the legend, common in Iceland, that Harald Fairhair was a tyrant who grew tired of the Viking raids from Orkney and Shetland and so invaded and destroyed the settlements there as well as in the Hebrides and on the Isle of Man. It also records that Harald bestowed the Earldom of Orkney on Sigurðr, brother of Jarl Rögnvaldr of Möer.

The Norse earldom in Orkney was effectively a kingdom which reached its zenith during the rule of Þórfinnr Sigurðarson. According to the saga he was a huge but ugly man, beetle-browed with a very large nose. He became Earl at the age of 5 in 1024 and ruled until his death in 1064. Every inch the warrior-king, he extended his domains onto

⁷ I am not certain about this date: there are references which state that King Harald Fairhair tried to annex Orkney in the 9th Century while other claim he never exercised control over the islands in his lifetime.

mainland Scotland and throughout the Western Isles. As a young man he would have fought many of his battles against the Scottish High King, Macbeth.



Since the indigenous Pict genetic slate was reputedly wiped clean by the Norse invasion, it is interesting to see how y-DNA is distributed in Orkney today. In a 2001 study, Wilson⁸ studied the incidence of three y-Haplogroups in Orkney, Norway, Friesland, Ireland, Wales and the Basque country. As the graph shows, the highest proportion of males in the islands belonged to the Celtic R1b haplogroup, the second highest frequency being for Haplogroup R1a (M17) and the third, Haplogroup I which is the one most closely associated

with the Vikings. The other, R1a is associated particularly with Slavic groups of eastern Europe but which reaches its highest frequency in western Europe in Iceland with about 23%. A quick look at these frequencies would suggest that the Celtic population were not all wiped out or if they had been, that others had taken their place, and that somewhere less than half of the inhabitants of the Orkneys were descended in the male line from Norse ancestors.

More recently, Goodacre et al⁹. studied both mitochondrial and y-chromosomal DNA in Orkney and Shetland Islands and found that

Our findings indicate an overall Scandinavian ancestry of approximately 44% for Shetland and approximately 30% for Orkney, with approximately equal contributions from Scandinavian male and female subjects in both cases. This contrasts with the situation for the Western Isles, where the overall Scandinavian ancestry is less (approximately 15%) and where there is a disproportionately high contribution from Scandinavian males..... Our results suggest that while areas close to Scandinavia, such as Orkney and Shetland, may have been settled primarily by Scandinavian family groups, lone Scandinavian males, who later established families with

⁸ Wilson, JF et al., "Genetic Evidence for Different Male and Female Roles During Cultural Transitions in the British Isles", Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, 2001, Vol. 98, No. 9, pp. 5078 - 5083.

⁹ Goodacre, S. et al: Genetic evidence for a family-based Scandinavian settlement of Shetland and Orkney during the Viking periods, *Heredity* (2005) 95, 129–135. doi:10.1038/sj.hdy.6800661; published online 6 April 2005.

female subjects from the British Isles, may have been prominent in areas more distant from their homeland.

Shetland



The Shetland Islands are about 60 miles (100km) north of Orkney and only about 24 hours sail from Bergen on the west coast of Norway. Until the 12th Century, the islands were part of the Earldom of Orkney. The Norse called these islands *Hjaltland* and used them as a staging post *en route* to Greenland.

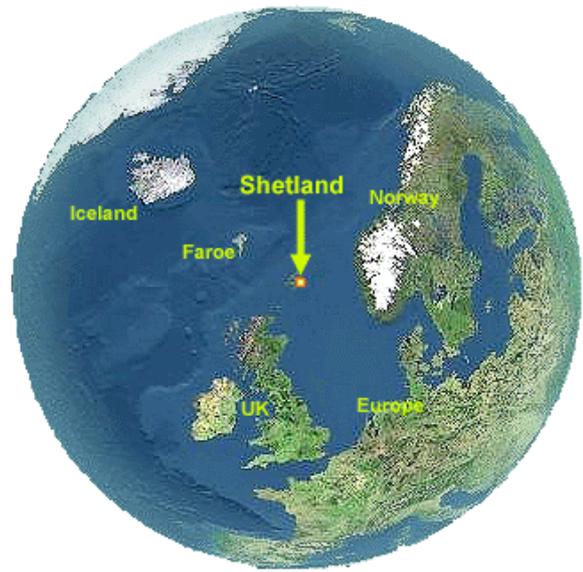


Although the archaeological evidence is disputed, some believe the Norse began to arrive in the islands from the 1st Century AD. Before then, the Romans recorded Picts living there. It was they who most probably built the many *brochs* which dot the islands.

What happened to these indigenous inhabitants after Norse began settling there in the late 8th Century, traces of the Pictish language, for instance, being rare? David Faux¹⁰, who runs a web-page devoted to the Shetland Islands, says that the early settlers were young men who took local Pictish wives, although it is possible there may have been massacres and population replacement.

¹⁰ <http://www.davidkfaux.org/shetlandislandshistchron.html>. The photo is also from Faux' site.

Later, in the 14th Century, contacts with Scotland began, particularly after 1379 when Henry Sinclair, from an old Scottish Caithness family, was made Earl of Orkney and Shetland. Then, in 1469, the debt-ridden king of Norway, Christian I, mortgaged Shetland to Scotland in return for funds with which to pay his daughter's dowry when Margaret married James III of Scotland. By the end of the century, large numbers of Scots were migrating to the islands. Shetland also had links with the Hanseatic League and other European countries, so there were probably small numbers of people settling there from Germany, Holland and Spain in particular. However, in 1707 the Acts of Union in Britain prevented Shetland selling its fish and other goods through the Hanseatic League and the Islands went into an economic decline.



The population of the Shetlands has fluctuated widely: by 1600, for example, probably one third of the population were of Scottish descent. By the middle of the 18th Century, there were about 15,000 people living there and maybe double that number a hundred years later. But from the 1860s on, large-scale emigration drastically reduced the population, most emigrants destined for mainland Britain,

	R1b %	I %	R1a %	Other %
SHETLAND	66	10	23	0
ORKNEY	64	15	19	.02
NORWAY	30	28	34	18
GERMANY/ DENMARK	39	39	12	10
SCOTLAND	80	10	.02	10
IRELAND	90	7	0	3
BASQUE	89	.02	0	10

North America, Australia and New Zealand. Many men also joined the Merchant Navy and never returned to their homeland. This trend was reversed with the oil boom of the mid-20th Century when British immigrants began to settle there.

Genetically, then, we might expect the Shetlands, like Orkney, to be rather mixed. In a study by Christian Capelli et al¹¹ in 2003 the relative numbers of the three main y-haplogroups were found to be as in the table above.

These figures, conclude Capelli and his colleagues, show that the Shetlands — and Orkney — *have significant Norwegian input but little or no German/Danish*, which in turn suggests that Anglo-Saxon or Danish Vikings made no contribution to the gene pool of these islands.



¹¹ Capelli, C et al., "A Y Chromosome Census of the British Isles", 2003, *Current Biology*, Vol. 13, May, pp. 979-984.